

1. (Currently amended) Communication apparatus that limits the sounds of the user speaking into the apparatus emanating outwardly to the surrounding environment so as to avoid disturbing people in that environment while enhancing the privacy of the user, said apparatus comprising, in combination:

a. a communication input device having a front surface that lies in a generally transverse plane, the area forwardly of said plane defining an external input area into which the user of the device speaks to communicate ~~with~~ to the device,

b. a body of sound-absorbing material, and

c. attachment means for mounting said body ~~on said~~ outwardly adjacent to the communication input device in an operative position for blocking and absorbing sounds of the user speaking into the input area so as to substantially reduce such sound passing outwardly to the surrounding environment.

said body being positioned generally at or rearwardly of said plane, thereby allowing substantially unobstructed inward passage of all sound including speech from the user from forwardly of said plane to the input device. in proximity to said input area; but without blocking a substantial portion of said input area, said body generally facing the user speaking into the input area to thereby reduce sound emitted to the surrounding environment from such speaking.

13. (Currently amended) A method of utilizing a communication input device in a manner that reduces so as to reduce the ambient sound produced sound in the surrounding environment so as to avoid disturbing people in that environment while enhancing the privacy of the user, when the user speaks into the device, ~~said the~~ communication input device having a front surface that lies in a generally transverse plane, the area forwardly of said plane defining an input area into which the user of the device speaks for to communicating with to the device, said method comprising the steps of:

~~a. providing a communication device having an external input area;~~

~~b. a. providing a sound-absorbing body means,~~

~~c. b. positioning the body sound-absorbing means outwardly adjacent to the input device in an operative position which is generally facing the user speaking into the input device so as to block and absorb sound spoken by the user into the input area to thereby substantially reduce such sound passing outwardly to the surrounding environment, said means not significantly extending into the input area so that sound coming to the input device from in front of the plane, including sound of the user speaking into the input area, is unimpeded, area, is in proximity to the input area, but does not block a substantial portion of the input area; such positioning of the body being for the purpose of allowing speech from the user to freely and directly reach the input area while reducing the peripheral or emanating speech from that speaker reaching the surrounding environment.~~

17. (Currently amended) ~~For~~ Communication apparatus that limits the sounds of the user speaking into the apparatus emanating outwardly to the surrounding environment so as to avoid disturbing people in that environment while enhancing the privacy of the user, said apparatus being for use with a communication input device having a front surface that lies in a generally transverse plane, the area forwardly of said plane defining an external input area into which the user of the device speaks to communicate with to the device, sound-absorbing said apparatus comprising:

- a. sound-absorbing panel that includes a rigid or semi-rigid backing sheet and a layer of sound-absorbing material and mounted on the backing sheet, and
- b. attachment means for mounting said sound-absorbing panel ~~on said outwardly adjacent to the communication input device in an operative position for blocking and absorbing sounds of the user speaking into the input area so as to substantially reduce such sound passing outwardly to the surrounding environment, said body being positioned generally at or rearwardly of said plane, thereby allowing substantially unobstructed inward passage of all sound including speech from the user from forwardly of said plane to the input device, in proximity to said input area but without blocking a substantial portion of said input area, said sound-absorbing material generally facing the user speaking into the input area to thereby reduce sound emitted to the surrounding environment from the such speaking.~~